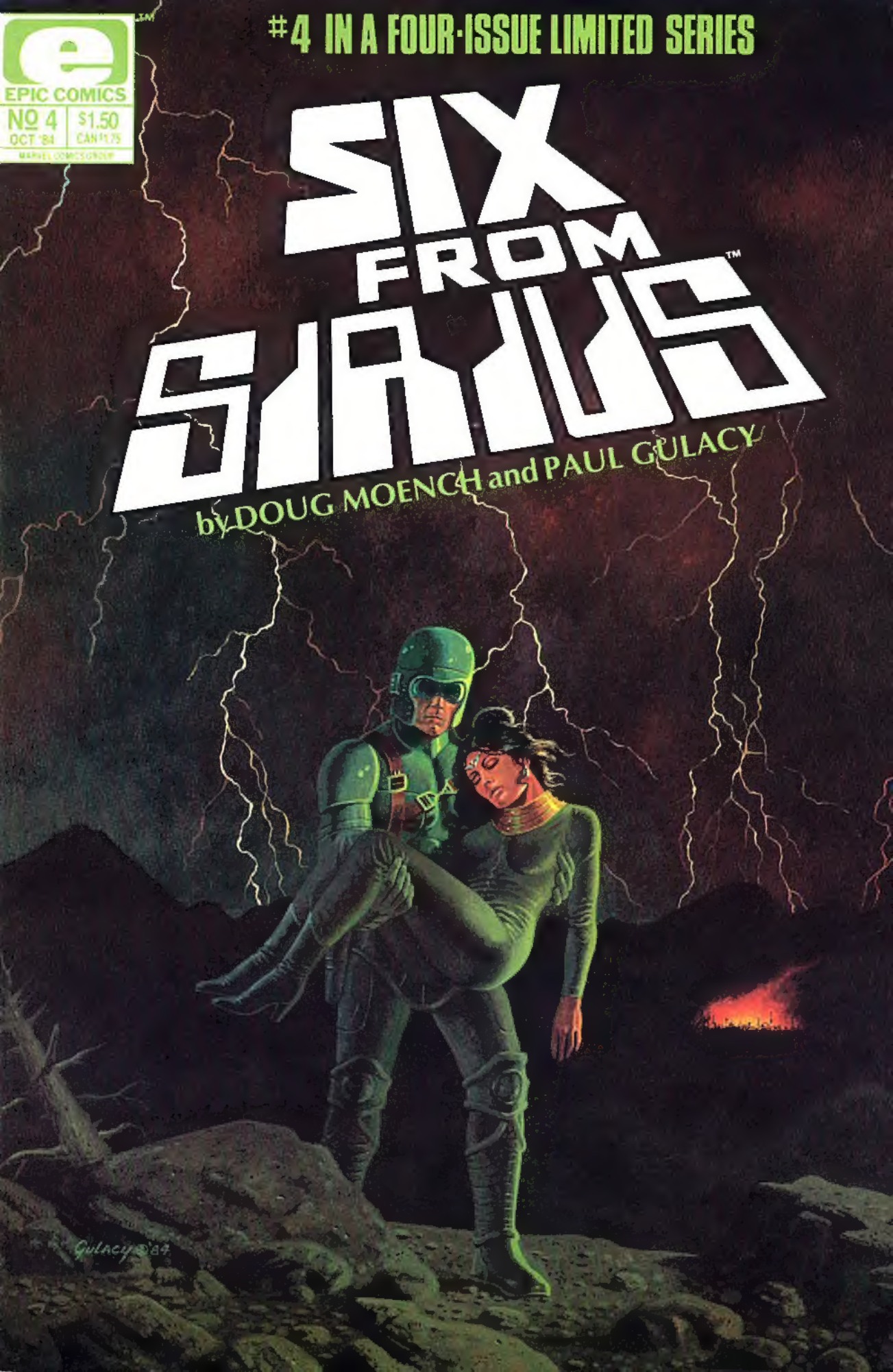
EPIC COMICS
No 4
OCT '84
$1.50
CAN $1.75
#4 IN A FOUR-ISSUE LIMITED SERIES
SIX FROM SIRIUS™
by DOUG MOENCH and PAUL GULACY
Gulacy '84

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IN PHASES I, II, AND III . . .

We learned that six agents from Sirius Hub — Jakosa Lone, Skreed, Zematin-Lar, Grod, LaMasque, and Starn — hope to forestall conflict between the worlds of Axellon and Balsamo. Fearing Balsamo Parbeam weapons stationed on Axellon's moon, called Heavenstone (and new home of outcast Spiritualists), Axellon has called for Peace Negotiations to be staged on the moon.

Deep in a nuclear wasteland on Axellon, and with Balsamo's estranged Peace Negotiators Phaedra now on their side, the six have a mysterious meeting with the collective life essence of the Five Elders, founders of the Heavenstone Spiritualist movement. Phaedra's latent ESPer powers are stirred by the encounter . . .

After flight to Heavenstone, Phaedra is captured by a Balsamo party and subsequently rescued by Jakosa and Grod. *Actually* rescued, however, is a murderous fax-woman *duplicate* of Phaedra.

Jakosa and Starn learn that the Parbeam weapons are mere cover for something called the Consciousness Actuator, source of ultimate power and fully capable of destroying a world. Furthermore, Balsamo has arranged the Negotiation date to coincide with a syzygy conjunction of all three worlds, so that Heavenstone itself will shield Balsamo from the exploding debris of Axellon. Phaedra alone, and only if her full powers are brought to bear, can stop the Actuator.

It is also discovered that Heavenstone is rich in precious Cidrion crystals; Sirius Hub's motives, then, are revealed in shades of greed. The mission will be completed freelance.

Starn locates the Actuator — atop the platform site of the pending Negotiations.

Meanwhile, the "real Phaedra" rescues herself and uses her awakening powers to tap the Balsamo computers, learning that Phaedra was assassinated long ago. She is, then, actually an agent from Sirius Hub, cosmetically altered to take Phaedra's place. But when Balsamo learned of the deception, her memory was edited and spliced with lies until *she* was convinced of her own pose. It was this mind-alteration which additionally suppressed her latent ESPer powers. The truth shatters her; she is really Shardreena, estranged lover of Jakosa Lone.

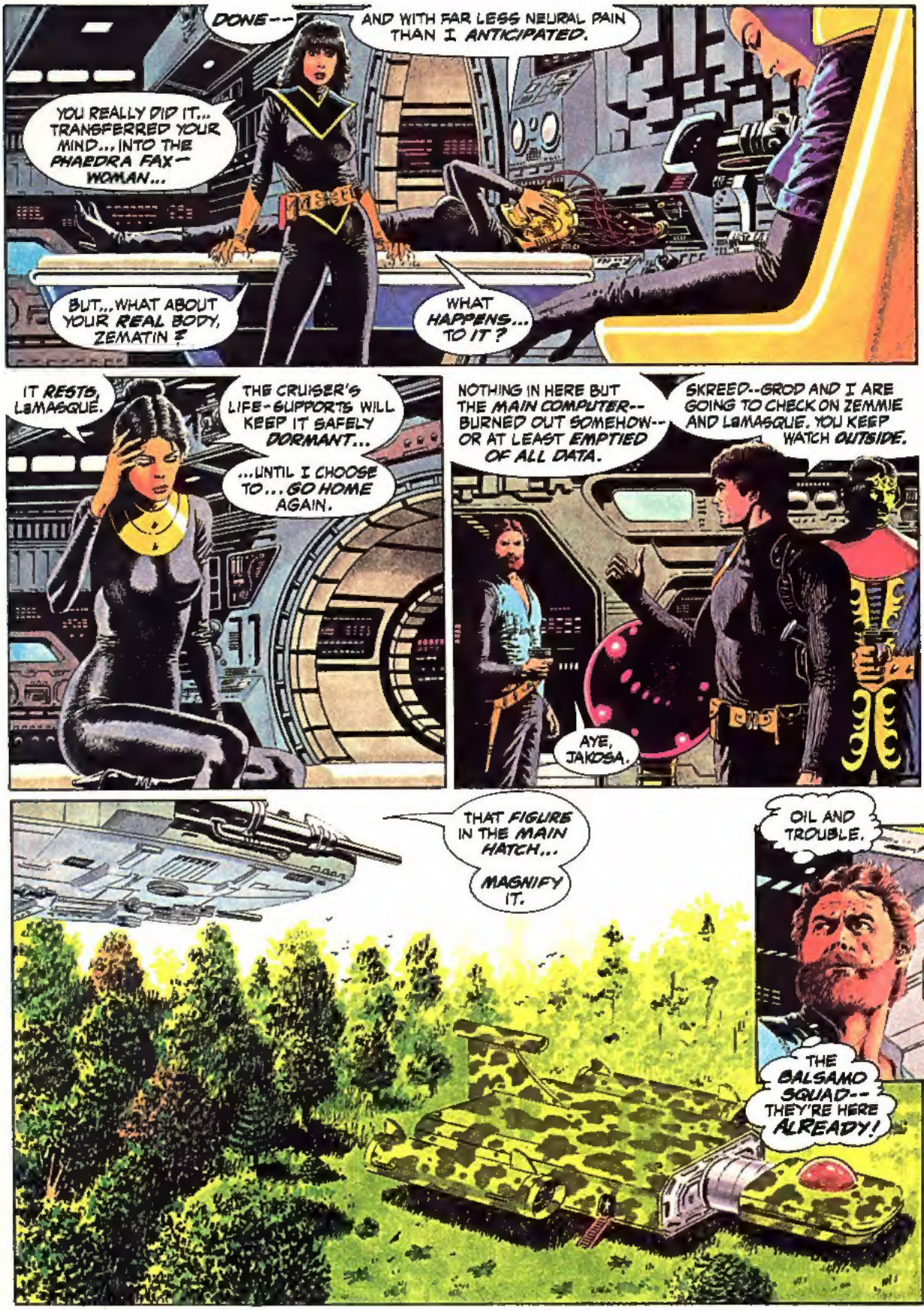
After severing ties with Jakosa for the *second* time in their lives, she goes off to her fateful destiny . . . and Jakosa now has double reason to reach her at the Negotiations.

Finally, against orders, Zematin-Lar has decided to become consummately intimate with the empty Phaedra fax-woman body . . .

AND NOW . . .

PHASE IV MIND-PRIME

SIX FROM SIRIUS™ Vol. 1, No. 4, October, 1984. Published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, James E. Galton, President; Stan Lee, Publisher; Michael Hobson, Vice-President, Publishing; Milton Schiffman, Vice-President, Production. Office of Publication: 387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. Published monthly. SIX FROM SIRIUS™ (including all prominent characters featured in this issue) and the distinctive likenesses thereof are the trademarks of Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy. "Epic Comics" is a trademark of the Marvel Comics Group. All SIX FROM SIRIUS™ material copyright © Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy. All other material © 1984 Marvel Comics Group. All Rights Reserved. Price $1.50 per copy in the US and $1.75 in Canada. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and / or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the condition that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. Printed in Canada.

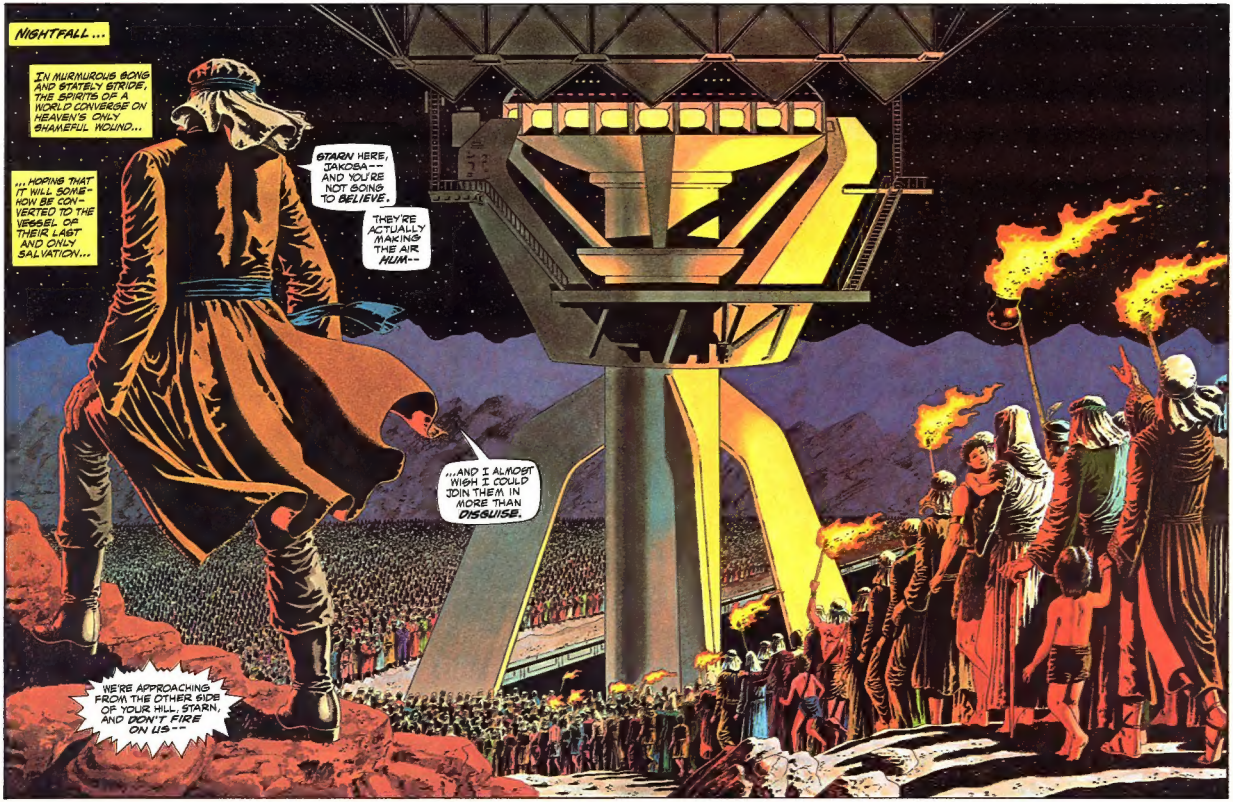

DONE--
AND WITH FAR LESS NEURAL PAIN THAN I ANTICIPATED.
YOU REALLY DID IT... TRANSFERRED YOUR MIND... INTO THE PHAEDRA FAX— WOMAN...
BUT... WHAT ABOUT YOUR REAL BODY, ZEMATIN?
WHAT HAPPENS... TO IT?
IT RESTS, LaMASQUE.
THE CRUISER'S LIFE-SUPPORTS WILL KEEP IT SAFELY DORMANT...
...UNTIL I CHOOSE TO... GO HOME AGAIN.
NOTHING IN HERE BUT THE MAIN COMPUTER-- BURNED OUT SOMEHOW-- OR AT LEAST EMPTIED OF ALL DATA.
SKREED--GROD AND I ARE GOING TO CHECK ON ZEMMIE AND LaMASQUE. YOU KEEP WATCH OUTSIDE.
AYE, JAKOSA.
THAT FIGURE IN THE MAIN HATCH...
MAGNIFY IT.
OIL AND TROUBLE.
THE BALSAMO SQUAD-- THEY'RE HERE ALREADY!

SMALL WONDER THE CREW HASN'T RESPONDED TO OUR CALLS...
THAT WAS ONE OF THE AGENTS FROM SIRIUS!
RIGHT--AND COMMANDER SHRIKE DEEMED PHAEDRA EXPENDABLE THE MOMENT SHE FELL INTO THEIR HANDS.
PREPARE TO DESTROY THE CRUISER.
ZEMATIN-LAR--LA MASQUE?
ARE YOU FINISHED WITH--
PHAEDRA?!
SHARDREENA--YOU ARE STILL HERE!
NO, JAKOSA.
IT...IT'S ME...
ZEMATIN-LAR.
WHAT?!
JAKOSA... BEFORE YOU GET TOO--
YOU FOOL, ZEMATIN!
YOU DON'T REALIZE WHAT YOU'VE--
JAKOSA!
THE BALSAMO SQUAD--THEY'RE AIR-BORNE AND RIGHT ABOVE US!

SHRAAAKT
PARBEAM!!
THE LIFE-SUPPORTS--!
STAY DOWN! I'LL TRY TO REACH THE CRUISER'S CANNONS BEFORE THEY MAKE ANOTHER PASS!
DIRECT HIT-- WE SLICED THE CRUISER IN HALF!
BETTER MAKE IT QUARTERS--JUST TO BE SURE.

STUPID...
...BASTARDS!
KAVOUM
ATTACKING FROM THE AIR--
--AT A TARGET THAT WAS ARMED AND HAD NOWHERE TO FALL.
MY... MY BODY...
OH MY GOD--!
I'M... TRAPPED NOW...

I'M SORRY, ZEMATIN... FOR JUMPING ON YOU LIKE THAT.
I...
BUT WHY, ZEMMIE? WHY DID YOU DISOBEY MY ORDERS?
MAYBE I WANTED TO BE THE HERO FOR ONCE...
...THE ONE TO SAVE THE DAY... BY APPEARING AT THE NEGOTIATIONS... AS PHAEDRA.
HER SHELL WON'T TURN THE TRICK, ZEMATIN...
WE NEED WHAT SHE'S GOT INSIDE.
THEN MAYBE THAT'S MY ANSWER TOO.
MAYBE I WANTED A BODY TO GO ALONG WITH MY SOLENOID SOUL... OR MAYBE I JUST WANTED TO SEE WHAT PHAEDRA SEES... WHEN YOU LOOK AT HER...
MAYBE I WANTED SOME OF YOUR LOVE... EVEN JUST THE GHOST OF IT...
OH, ZEMMIE...
BUT TELL ME, JAKOSA, PLEASE...
IT'S NOT SO TERRIBLE TO WALK AWAY FROM YOUR REAL BODY... IS IT?
THE CRUISER'S HOVERCARS ARE ALL EMPTY, GROD... BUT THE MAIN STORAGE TANK TOOK ONLY MINIMAL DAMAGE.
I'LL START SIPHONING!
BUT AFTER SEEING THIS... NEVER AGAIN WILL I STEP OUT OF MYSELF TO SUPERCILIOUSLY NARRATE EVERY PETTY ACTION MY BODY MIGHT TAKE.


NIGHTFALL...
IN MURMUROUS BONG AND STATELY STRIDE, THE SPIRITS OF A WORLD CONVERGE ON HEAVEN'S ONLY SHAMEFUL WOUND...
...HOPING THAT IT WILL SOMEHOW BE CONVERTED TO THE VESSEL OF THEIR LAST AND ONLY SALVATION...
STARN HERE, JAKOBA--AND YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE.
THEY'RE ACTUALLY MAKING THE AIR HUM--
...AND I ALMOST WISH I COULD JOIN THEM IN MORE THAN DISGUISE.
WE'RE APPROACHING FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF YOUR HILL, STARN, AND DON'T FIRE ON US---

--NO MATTER WHAT YOU SEE.
WELL, WELL, WELL...
WHAT I SEE IS THAT YOU RAN INTO THAT BALGAMO SQUAD OF FAX-MEN-- BUT HOW'D YOU CONVINCE THEM TO PART WITH THE SUITS?
JAKOSA SENT A HOT PRAYER ON HIGH, AND LIKE MANNA FROM HEAVEN DID THEY FALL DOWN UNTO OUR NEEDS.
WHERE'S ZEMATIN?
SHE'S PHAEDRA NOW--AND PHAEDRA IS REALLY SHARDREENA.
SAY AGAIN, SKREED?

WE DIDN'T *GET* PHAEDRA, STARN-- BUT I GOT A *FACSIMILE* OF HER.

AND WE'D BEST LEAVE IT AT THAT--DETAILS LATER, IF WE SURVIVE THE *ZERO-HOUR* SWIFTLY APPROACHING.

SUIT YOURSELVES.

I PLANTED *CHARGES* HALFWAY UP THAT *PYLON*.

HOPE IT FITS WITH YOUR PLAN.

WE DON'T REALLY *HAVE* A PLAN, STARN.

BUT SROD KNOWS IT WON'T *STOP* US.

WAIT JUST A--

WHEN I SAID I WANTED TO BE *SELF-EMPLOYED*, I DIDN'T MEAN I WANTED TO *WING IT WITHOUT*--

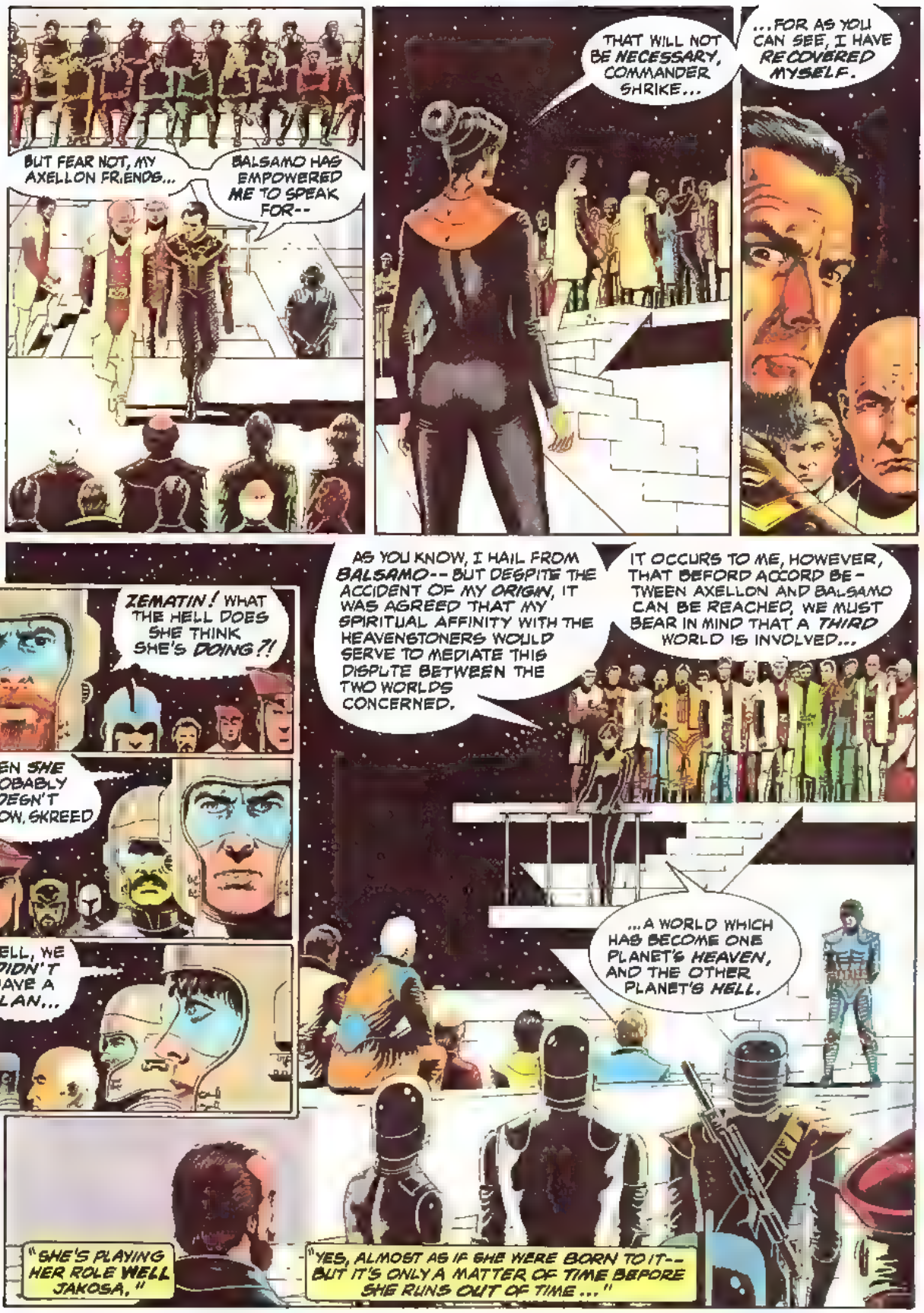
THAT *THUNDERCLAP*-- SOMETHING POPPING OUT OF *DRIVE*...

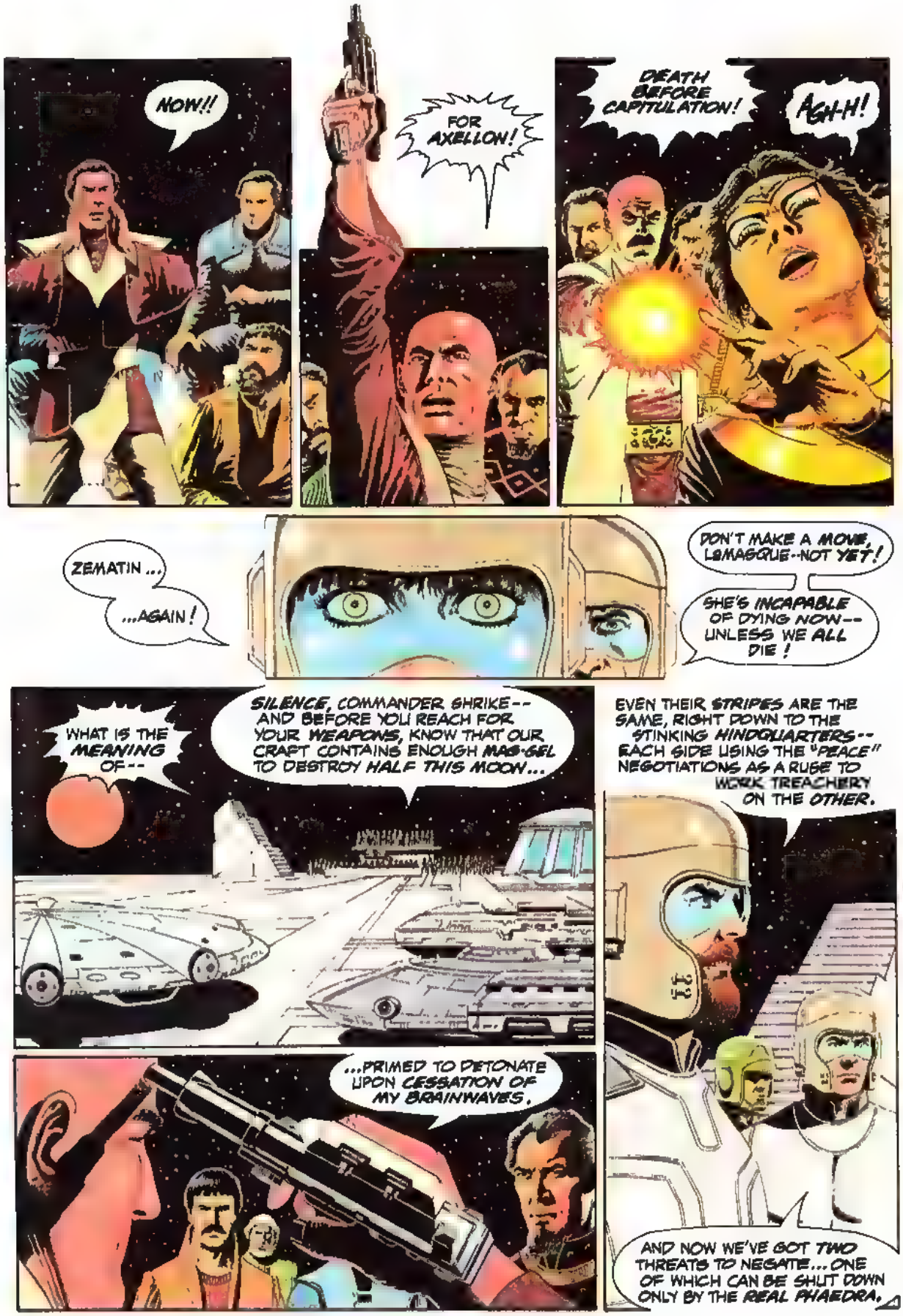
AN *AXELLON SHIP*-- DESCENDING TO THE *PLATFORM*...

THEIR *NEGOTIATORS*-- IT'LL START SOON.

YES... BUT *WHAT* WILL START?

STARN, YOU STAY HERE WITH YOUR DETONATOR AS A LAST RESORT.
WE'LL USE THE AXELLON LANDING AS DISTRACTION TO REACH THE PLATFORM.
WELL, THEY'RE HERE, COMMANDER SHRIKE.
YES--A QUARTER-CYCLE EARLY.
A QUARTER-CYCLE BEFORE PERFECT SYZYGY-CONJUNCTION.
ALL RIGHT...
...BLEND IN WITH THE BALSAMO GUARDS.
WELCOME, AMBASSADORS.
YOUR MOON HAS CHANGED, HAS IT NOT?
WERE IT OTHERWISE, COMMANDER SHRIKE, WE WOULD HARDY BE HERE.
BUT, WHERE IS YOUR NEGOTIATOR--THE AMBASSADOR PHAEDRA?
AH...I REGRET TO SAY THAT SHE HAS BEEN...
...INCAPACITATED.


BUT FEAR NOT, MY AXELLON FRIENDS...
BALSAMO HAS EMPOWERED ME TO SPEAK FOR--
THAT WILL NOT BE NECESSARY, COMMANDER SHRIKE...
...FOR AS YOU CAN SEE, I HAVE RECOVERED MYSELF.
ZEMATIN! WHAT THE HELL DOES SHE THINK SHE'S DOING?!
AS YOU KNOW, I HAIL FROM BALSAMO-- BUT DESPITE THE ACCIDENT OF MY ORIGIN, IT WAS AGREED THAT MY SPIRITUAL AFFINITY WITH THE HEAVENSTONERS WOULD SERVE TO MEDIATE THIS DISPUTE BETWEEN THE TWO WORLDS CONCERNED.
IT OCCURS TO ME, HOWEVER, THAT BEFORD ACCORD BE-TWEEN AXELLON AND BALSAMO CAN BE REACHED, WE MUST BEAR IN MIND THAT A THIRD WORLD IS INVOLVED...
EVEN SHE PROBABLY DOESN'T KNOW, SKREED
WELL, WE DIDN'T HAVE A PLAN...
...A WORLD WHICH HAS BECOME ONE PLANET'S HEAVEN, AND THE OTHER PLANET'S HELL.
"SHE'S PLAYING HER ROLE WELL JAKOSA,"
"YES, ALMOST AS IF SHE WERE BORN TO IT-- BUT IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE SHE RUNS OUT OF TIME..."


NOW!!
FOR AXELLON!
DEATH BEFORE CAPITULATION!
AGH-H!
ZEMATIN ...
...AGAIN!
DON'T MAKE A MOVE, LaMASQUE--NOT YET!
SHE'S INCAPABLE OF DYING NOW--UNLESS WE ALL DIE!
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF--
SILENCE, COMMANDER SHRIKE--AND BEFORE YOU REACH FOR YOUR WEAPONS, KNOW THAT OUR CRAFT CONTAINS ENOUGH MAG-GEL TO DESTROY HALF THIS MOON...
EVEN THEIR STRIPES ARE THE SAME, RIGHT DOWN TO THE STINKING HINDQUARTERS--EACH SIDE USING THE "PEACE" NEGOTIATIONS AS A RUSE TO WORK TREACHERY ON THE OTHER.
...PRIMED TO DETONATE UPON CESSATION OF MY BRAINWAVES.
AND NOW WE'VE GOT TWO THREATS TO NEGATE... ONE OF WHICH CAN BE SHUT DOWN ONLY BY THE REAL PHAEDRA.

YOU'RE BLUFFING.

THEN CALL THE BLUFF.

MAKE ONE MOVE TO THREATEN AXELLON WITH YOUR PARBEAMS, AND SEE IF I DON'T *GLADLY* DIE TO STOP YOU.

DO IT, SIR--SYZYGY IS IMMINENT-- THE CONSCIOUSNESS ACTUATOR WILL RISE IN MOMENTS--WE'RE ALL FAXMEN--WE'VE GOT NOTHING TO LOSE!

YES...

SYZYGY ALIGNMENT ATTAINED.

RAISE *CONSCIOUSNESS ACTUATOR.*

WE'D BETTER DO SOMETHING *SOON, JAKOSA...*

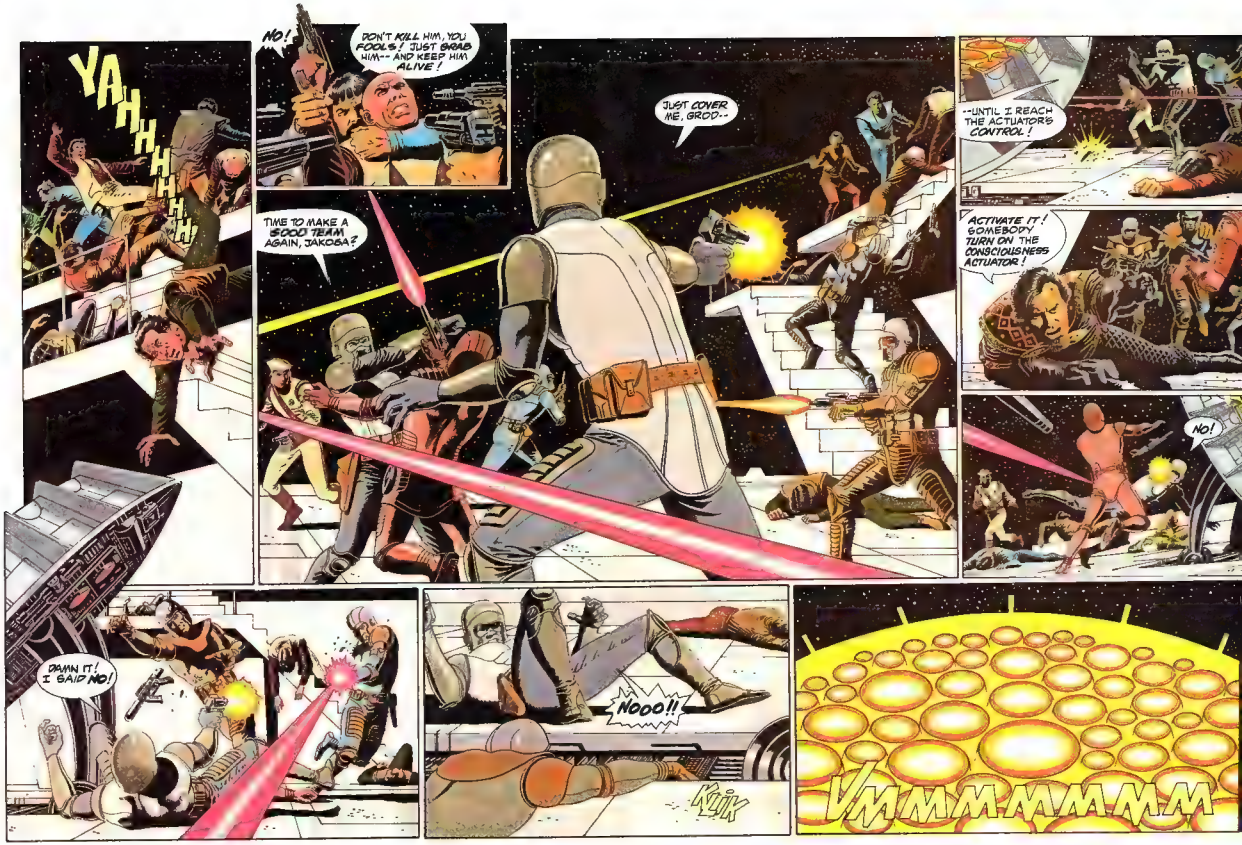
APPARENTLY, YOU DON'T *UNDERSTAND,* SHRIKE.

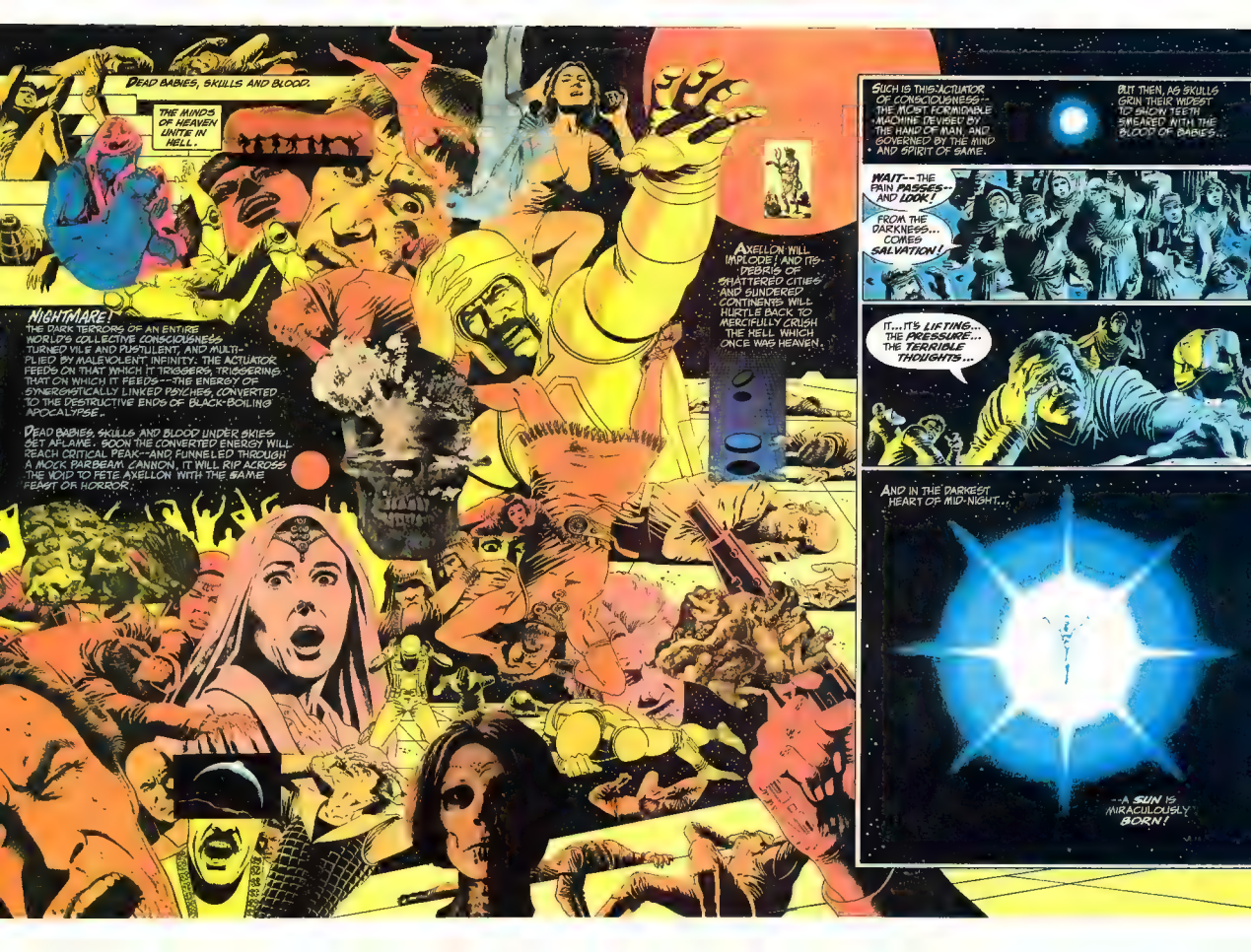
MY LIFE IS *NOTHING* TO ME OR MY MEN! THEY'VE BEEN *PSYCHOLOGICALLY TRAINED* TO SCORCH MY--

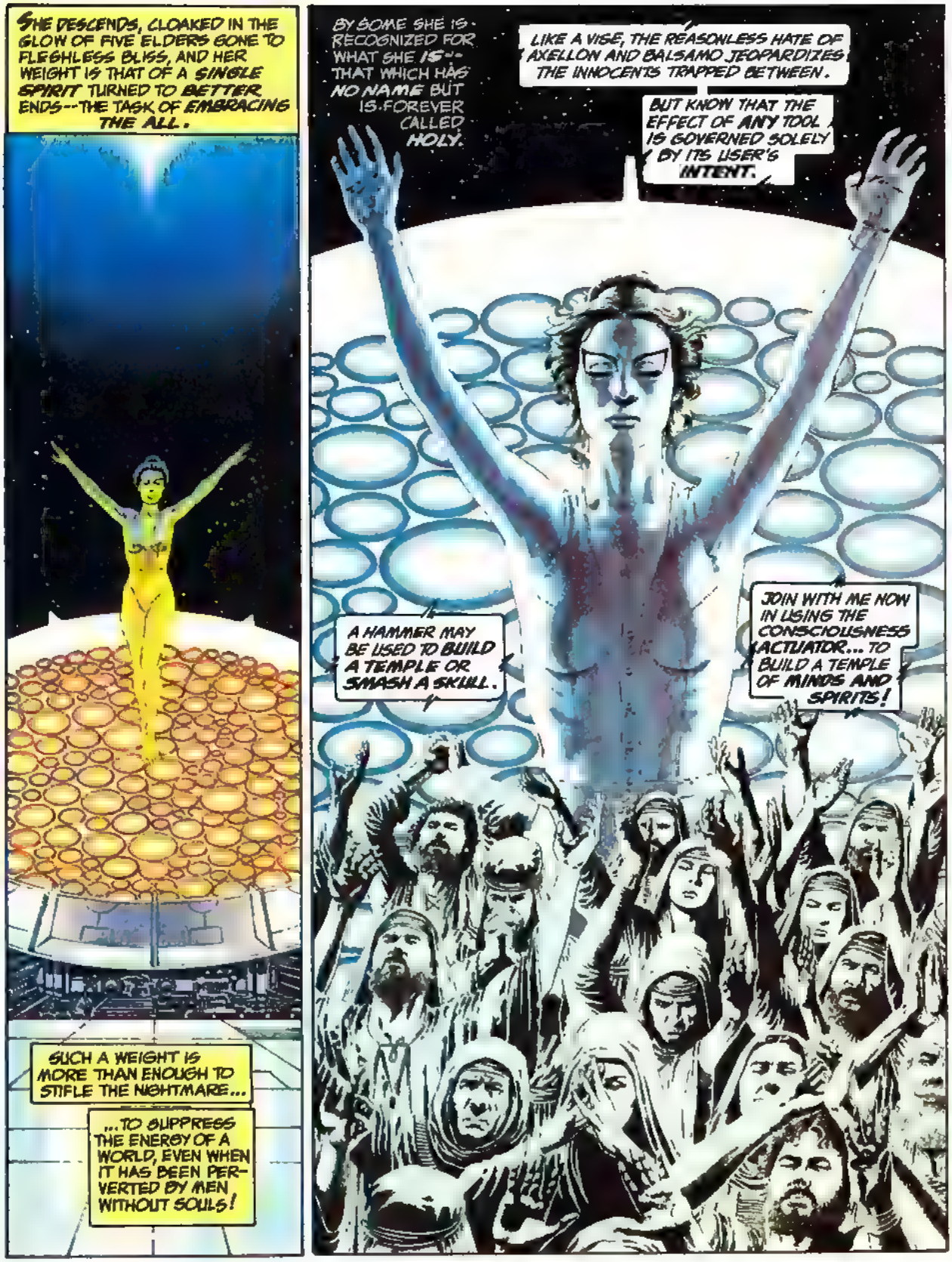
AND *I'VE* BEEN PROGRAMMED TO SEE THAT YOU AND *ALL* OF YOUR KIND ARE *SCORCHED OUT OF EXISTENCE!*

ACTUATOR CONVERTOR TRAINED ON TARGET...
AXELLON, DEAD— CENTER.
VERY WELL, SHRIKE-- YOU'VE IGNORED MY FINAL WARNING, AND NOW WE'LL ALL PAY...

NOW, STARN-- FAST!!
YOU'VE GOT IT, JAKOBA-- AND GET READY TO--
CHEK!
BAOUM
"--TILT!"
VZZLHT
I MISSED--!


YAHHHHHHH!
NO!
DON'T KILL HIM, YOU FOOLS! JUST GRAB HIM-- AND KEEP HIM ALIVE!
TIME TO MAKE A $COOL TEAM AGAIN, JAKOBA?
JUST COVER ME, GROD--
--UNTIL I REACH THE ACTUATOR'S CONTROL!
ACTIVATE IT! SOMEBODY TURN ON THE CONSCIOUSNESS ACTUATOR!
NO!
DAMN IT! I SAID NO!
NOOO!!
KIK
VMMMMMMMM


DEAD BABIES, SKULLS AND BLOOD.
THE MINDS OF HEAVEN UNITE IN HELL.
NIGHTMARE! THE DARK TERRORS OF AN ENTIRE WORLD'S COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS TURNED VILE AND PUSTULENT, AND MULTIPLIED BY MALEVOLENT INFINITY: THE ACTUATOR FEEDS ON THAT WHICH IT FEEDS--THE ENERGY OF SYNERGISTICALLY LINKED PSYCHES, CONVERTED TO THE DESTRUCTIVE ENDS OF BLACK-BOILING APOCALYPSE.
DEAD BABIES, SKULLS AND BLOOD UNDER SKIES SET AFLAME. SOON THE CONVERTED ENERGY WILL REACH CRITICAL PEAK--AND, FUNNELED THROUGH A MOCK PARSEAM CANNON, IT WILL RIP ACROSS THE VOID TO FETE AXELLON WITH THE SAME FEAST OF HORROR.
AXELLON WILL IMPLODE! AND ITS DEBRIS OF SHATTERED CITIES AND SUNDERED CONTINENTS WILL HURTLE BACK TO MERCIFULLY CRUSH THE HELL WHICH ONCE WAS HEAVEN.
SUCH IS THIS ACTUATOR OF CONSCIOUSNESS--THE MOST FORMIDABLE MACHINE DEVISED BY THE HAND OF MAN, AND GOVERNED BY THE MIND AND SPIRIT OF SAME.
BUT THEN, AS SKULLS GRIN THEIR WIDEST TO SHOW TEETH SMEARED WITH THE BLOOD OF BABIES...
WAIT--THE PAIN PASSES--AND LOOK!
FROM THE DARKNESS... COMES SALVATION!
IT...IT'S LIFTING... THE PRESSURE... THE TERRIBLE THOUGHTS...
AND IN THE DARKEST HEART OF MID-NIGHT...
--A SUN IS MIRACULOUSLY BORN!


SHE DESCENDS, CLOAKED IN THE GLOW OF FIVE ELDERS GONE TO FLESHLESS BLISS, AND HER WEIGHT IS THAT OF A SINGLE SPIRIT TURNED TO BETTER ENDS--THE TASK OF EMBRACING THE ALL.
SUCH A WEIGHT IS MORE THAN ENOUGH TO STIFLE THE NIGHTMARE...
...TO SUPPRESS THE ENERGY OF A WORLD, EVEN WHEN IT HAS BEEN PERVERTED BY MEN WITHOUT SOULS!
BY SOME SHE IS RECOGNIZED FOR WHAT SHE IS-- THAT WHICH HAS NO NAME BUT IS FOREVER CALLED HOLY.
LIKE A VISE, THE REASONLESS HATE OF AXELLON AND BALSAMO JEOPARDIZES THE INNOCENTS TRAPPED BETWEEN.
BUT KNOW THAT THE EFFECT OF ANY TOOL IS GOVERNED SOLELY BY ITS USER'S INTENT.
A HAMMER MAY BE USED TO BUILD A TEMPLE OR SMASH A SKULL.
JOIN WITH ME NOW IN USING THE CONSCIOUSNESS ACTUATOR... TO BUILD A TEMPLE OF MINDS AND SPIRITS!

BY OTHERS, SHE IS SIMPLY DESPISED!
YOUR MINDS CRY OUT FOR ME... BUT I NEED YOU.
AND BY STILL OTHERS, SHE IS SEEN AS MYSTERY ITSELF.
IT'S PHAEDRA...BUT SHE...SHE'S LIKE AN ANGEL...AN ANGEL IN AGONY...
YOU MUST JOIN ME! YOU MUST SURRENDER YOURSELVES!
I'VE HALTED THE DESTRUCTIVE ENERGY--BUT I CAN'T CONVERT IT TO ITS OPPOSITE END--CAN'T FORCE IT TO... APOTHEOSIS!
MY OWN MIND IS NOT ENOUGH! IT IS HELD BACK--WEAKENED--BY THE BONDS OF FLESH!
AND IF YOU CAN'T HELP ME, THEN I MUST--
STOP IT, SHARDREENA! YOU'VE AVERTED THE DESTRUCTION OF TWO WORLDS--ACCOMPLISHED THE VERY GOAL OF OUR ENTIRE MISSION! THAT'S ENOUGH!
LET HER BE, JAKOSA!
IT IS NOT ENOUGH...
THERE IS STILL DANGER HERE!
SHE HAS LEARNED THE SECRET OF INTIMACY WITH MACHINES...YET THE ACTUATOR IS COLDLY AWESOME.
IT ABSORBS THE TOTALITY OF HER EFFORT... AND THERE ARE MANY FAX-MEN.
THEY FIGHT HER.

THE PARBEAMS!

DESTROY HER!

NOOO!!

THEY RIP FROM THE GROUND OF HEAVENSTONE--

--STREAK TO THE PLATFORM--

--CLUSTERING AROUND ONE MIND'S SECOND BODY EVEN AS THE PARBEAMS STRIKE...

--AND ARE SPLASHED BACK IN HARMLESS NEEDLES OF LIGHT...

...DEFLECTED BY A COCOON OF GIDRION CRYSTALS.

ELDERS... IS THIS YOUR WORK?

IT IS, AND WE BEAR THE GIFT OF *CHOICE*.

THE CRYSTALS CAN EITHER *SHIELD* YOU FROM THE PARBEAMS, OR *FOCUS* THE PARBEAM ENERGY *INTO* YOU.

SHOULD YOU CHOOSE THE *SHIELD*, THE ACTUATOR'S ENERGY WILL REMAIN IN *STASIS*.

SHOULD YOU *ABSORB* THE PARBEAMS, YOU WILL SUCCEED IN *CONVERTING* THE ENERGY... BUT ONLY AT THE COST OF *YOUR FLESH*.

THEN, ELDERS, THE CHOICE IS A GIFT INDEED--
--AND I GLADLY CHOOSE TO JOIN YOUR SPIRIT--
PHAEDRA! SHARDREENA! NOT AGAIN--!
"WHY, JAKOSA? WHY MUST YOU DISOBEY MY WISHES?"
"SHARDREENA...NOTHING WILL CHANGE, NOT REALLY. A LOT OF PEOPLE HAVE DONE IT. IT'S STILL FLESH AND BLOOD, NOT LIKE A FAX-MAN. I'LL LOOK EXACTLY THE SAME..."
"BUT YOU WON'T BE THE SAME! YOU WON'T BE REAL ANYMORE!"
"I SIMPLY WON'T AGE, SHARDREENA. WHY NOT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WHAT SCIENCE OFFERS?"
"BECAUSE YOU'LL BE AIDING MEN IN THEIR ATTEMPT TO PLAY GOD! BECAUSE THE ONLY WAY YOU'LL EVER PASS TO THE SPIRIT IS THROUGH A GATE OF VIOLENCE--BY FALLING VICTIM TO FATAL ACCIDENT OR MURDER! AND BECAUSE I REFUSE TO JOIN YOU IN SUCH A VAIN, MAD--"
"SHARDREENA, IT'S JUST A BODY..."
"MAYBE THAT'S BEEN THE PROBLEM ALL ALONG, JAKOSA. MAYBE I'VE ALWAYS WANTED... SOMETHING MORE."

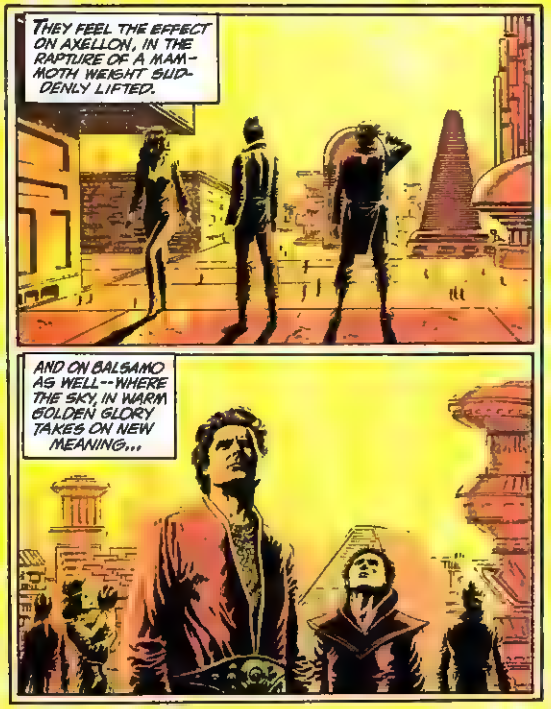
--EVEN AS MY BODY BECOMES THE INSTRUMENT WHICH JOINS THE MINDS AND SPIRITS OF **ALL**.

IN GLORIOUS LIGHT OR TRAGIC FIRE, SHE SACRIFICES THAT WHICH HAS CAUSED HER SO MUCH PAIN, FILLING HER FLESH WITH DEATH MAGNIFIED BY A THOUSAND CRYSTALS.

SUFFUSED WITH THE PARBEAMS' REFRACTED ENERGY, SHE FLARES LIKE A **TRUE** ANGEL--AND HER MIND **BURSTS FREE**.

NO LONGER SHACKLED, HER POWERS ARE ENOUGH...AND THE ACTUATOR OF CONSCIOUSNESS BECOMES A TOOL FOR HER USE ALONE.

FLOATING FAR BEYOND CARE, SHE **USES** IT.


THEY FEEL THE EFFECT ON AXELLON, IN THE RAPTURE OF A MAMMOTH WEIGHT SUDDENLY LIFTED.
AND ON BALSAMO AS WELL--WHERE THE SKY, IN WARM GOLDEN GLORY TAKES ON NEW MEANING...

BUT NOWHERE IS THE SHARED FEELING OF JOINED MINDS SWEETER OR STRONGER THAN HERE ON HEAVENSTONE...

...UNDER THE SHINING EXAMPLE OF SHE WHO DARED MAKE IT POSSIBLE...

...BY FOREGOING HER OWN PLACE IN THE SUBLIME SCHEME OF IT ALL.

YET EVERY TEAR IS HERE WEPT IN JOY...

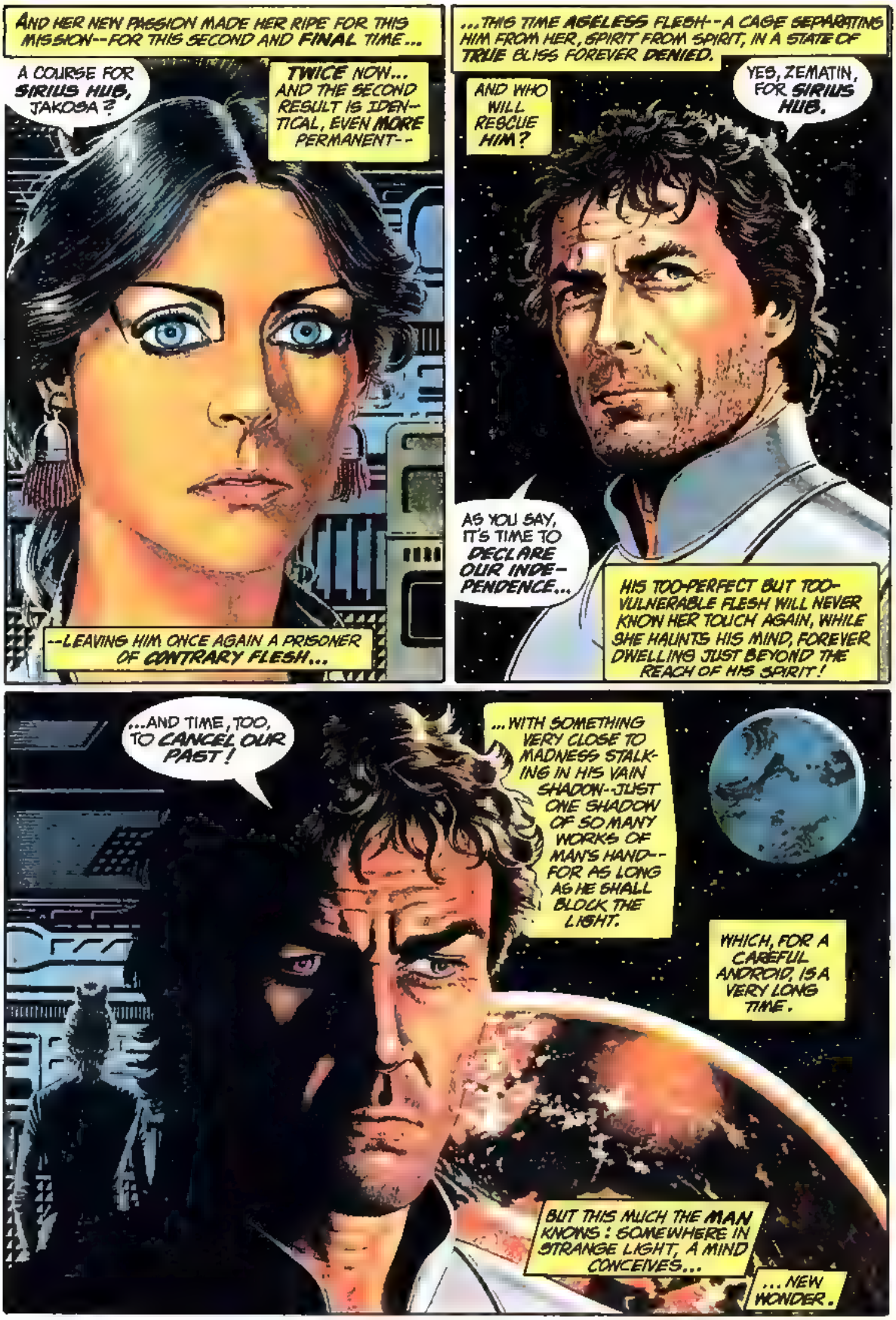
...FOR SHE ASCENDS, NOW, TO JOIN IN **GREATER** COMMUNION...

...WHERE SHE WILL FOREVER DWELL WITHIN THE HEARTS OF FIVE ELDERS, WITHIN THE EMBRACE OF THE UNDYING LIFE-FORCE...

...SOMEWHERE SILKEN IN THE LANDLESS AND BOUNDLESS HAVEN OF INFINITY.

AND ON A PLATFORM BENEATH IT ALL, THE MINDS OF MEN AND MACHINES ALIKE ARE DAZED WITH BLISS... YET SOBERED BY REMORSE.
AS THE BALSAMO EMISSARY TO THESE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS,.. I...I WISH TO--
WE KNOW, COMMANDER SHRIKE.
AND AS THE NEGOTIATORS FROM AXELLON...
...WE RECIPROCATE YOUR FEELINGS.
FOR THREE WORLDS--TWO FORMER HELLS AND THE FLAWED HEAVEN BETWEEN--THERE IS NOW HOPE... AND MORE, THERE IS NOW FAITH.
STRONGER BY A SOUL, THE LIFE-FORCE VAULTS INTO THE HEAVENS.
SHARDREENA...
FORGIVE ME, JAKOSA LONE, EVEN AS I FORGIVE YOU.
I AM HERE...WHENEVER YOU DECIDE TO JOIN ME...

EPILOGUE:
NICE OF THE BALSAMOITES TO LET US HAVE THIS SHIP...
BUT I GUESS THEY WON'T BE NEEDING IT... NOW THAT THEY'VE DECIDED TO STAY ON HEAVENSTONE.
AYE, STARN, AND 'TWAS AS THE LIFE-FORCE AFFIRMED...
EVEN FAX-MEN ARE BLESSED WITH SOULS.
THERE--YOUR BODY'S AS GOOD AS NEW ZEMATIN.
BUT GOD HELP ME... I'LL NEVER BE ALONE IN IT.
THANK YOU, LaMASQUE.
WELL, JAKOSA?
TIME TO DECLARE OUR INDEPENDENCE?
TWICE NOW.
OH, GOD, WHOSE UNIVERSE IS SO LIMITLESS IN SHADES OF PAIN... TO MAKE ME FEEL BLISS AT A TIME OF SUCH GRIEF...
TWICE NOW.
YES, ZEMATIN.
PLOT OUR COURSE.
THE FIRST TIME MADE HER TURN AWAY, STRIVING TO SHUN HER VERY FLESH AND ITS BASE CRIES FOR COMFORT, FINDING SOME KIND OF ESCAPE AND ANOTHER KIND OF SOLACE IN A REACH FOR MORE EVANESCENT SUCCOR...
...IN AN ALL-CONSUMING PASSION FOR THE INVIOLABLE SANCTITY AND SECURITY OF THE SPIRIT...


AND HER NEW PASSION MADE HER RIPE FOR THIS MISSION--FOR THIS SECOND AND FINAL TIME...
A COURSE FOR SIRIUS HUB, JAKOSA?
TWICE NOW... AND THE SECOND RESULT IS IDENTICAL, EVEN MORE PERMANENT--
--LEAVING HIM ONCE AGAIN A PRISONER OF CONTRARY FLESH...
...THIS TIME AGELESS FLESH--A CAGE SEPARATING HIM FROM HER, SPIRIT FROM SPIRIT, IN A STATE OF TRUE BLISS FOREVER DENIED.
AND WHO WILL RESCUE HIM?
YES, ZEMATIN, FOR SIRIUS HUB.
AS YOU SAY, IT'S TIME TO DECLARE OUR INDEPENDENCE...
HIS TOO-PERFECT BUT TOO-VULNERABLE FLESH WILL NEVER KNOW HER TOUCH AGAIN, WHILE SHE HAUNTS HIS MIND, FOREVER DWELLING JUST BEYOND THE REACH OF HIS SPIRIT!
...AND TIME, TOO, TO CANCEL OUR PAST!
...WITH SOMETHING VERY CLOSE TO MADNESS STALKING IN HIS VAIN SHADOW--JUST ONE SHADOW OF SO MANY WORKS OF MAN'S HAND--FOR AS LONG AS HE SHALL BLOCK THE LIGHT.
WHICH, FOR A CAREFUL ANDROID, IS A VERY LONG TIME.
BUT THIS MUCH THE MAN KNOWS: SOMEWHERE IN STRANGE LIGHT, A MIND CONCEIVES...
... NEW WONDER.

THE MAKING OF . . .

"So whaddaya think? Wanna do something again?"

"Yeah, sure, always feels like magic when we team up. But you've said this before and I'm still waiting."

"I'm ready now, man. Wanna come back and show what I can do."

"And the advertising work? You gonna turn down money like that?"

Narrow road darkly snaking along the Delaware. Pink dogwoods and burgundy Japanese maples splashed on both sides. The '76 black Arrow slashing like a shark through the Bucks County spring of '79. Whooosh.

"You Jackie Stewart, man? What if a deer jumps out?"

"Under the speed limit. Almost. What about the advertising?"

"Sometimes it sucks, man. Money's great, though."

"Yeah, but you're a storyteller, man. People see a TV commercial, nobody knows it was made from Gulacy storyboards. Where's the satisfaction? You're on the take to be invisible."

"So here I am in full color again, but whatever we do together, gotta be no deadlines. That **Kung Fu** stuff, man, sixteen hours at the board, nearly killed my back. And I can't refuse *every* account job . . . "

"Gotcha. So what'll we do on no deadline?"

"I dunno. You're the *writer,* man. No superheroes."

From the river up steep grades and down sharp curves. Zoom-golly-golly, roller coaster time. Out of nowhere: A deer and squealing brakes.

"Told you, man. Coulda killed that thing. Beautiful, man, with the sun on it like that? Almost red."

"Woulda killed *me*. I choke up every time my cat kills a rabbit."

"See? *That's* what we gotta do in this story. *Emotion*, man."

Crunching gravel drive. Home on the hill.

"How 'bout science fiction? Not cold high-tech stuff so much — although *some*, for verisimilitude — but futuristic exaggerated situations to make the emotional reactions more extreme. Lots of action with globally high stakes but tightening the focus to the intimate level of a love story beyond flesh, with ESP maybe . . . "

"As long as it's got real *spirit*, man, and far-out visuals. I wanna turn myself loose."

"After too much Mad Ave, you still love comics, man. Magic."

"Hey, here's the title: **Six From Sirius.**"

"Six from *what*, man?"

"With an 'i' and no 'o.' It's a double-star, one of the nearest systems likely to have habitable planets."

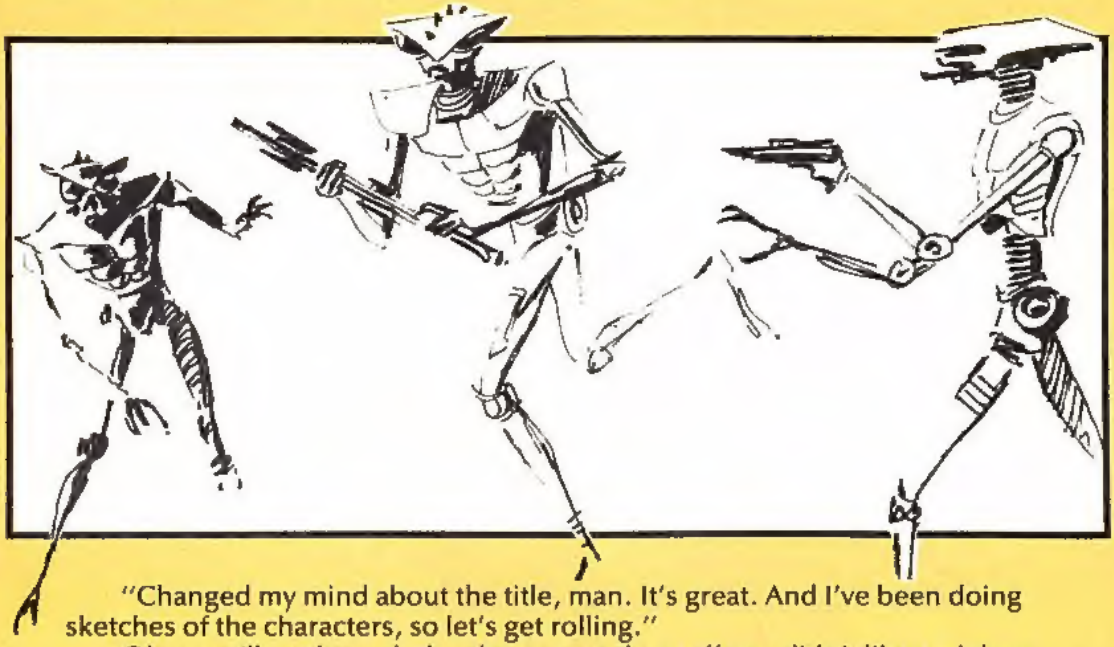
"And the six are our guys, like a Bond team in the future?"

"Don't forget the women, and we don't wanna do just James Bond in outer space. I'm extrapolating the Cuban Missile Crisis with two worlds and a moon instead of two countries and an island, but that's only the springboard. After that, we turn it into real science fiction and — God, it's cold, blizzard time out here — wait a sec while I turn the kerosene heater toward the phone . . . Okay, I'm back. Listen, I just mentioned this briefly to Archie and he's willing to run it as a serial in **Epic Illustrated**, no deadlines."

"Great. So let's run through it. I'm hot to get started."

"Okay, I'll read through my notes and you tell me what you like and don't like and I'll call you back in a few days."

"Right away I'm not too flipped about the title, man . . . "



"Changed my mind about the title, man. It's great. And I've been doing sketches of the characters, so let's get rolling."

Okay, we'll go through the changes on the stuff you didn't like and then I'll type up the first part of the plot and send it to you."

"I'm ready, man. How long you think the whole thing'll run?"

"Oh, maybe 45 to 50 pages, tops."

"Hey, you gotta be kidding with this plot, man."

"Paul, is that you? We must have a bad connection because I just heard something impossible and what's more I don't like what I heard."

"Come on, man. We can't do this."

"All right. Tell me what you don't like and I'll change it . . . "

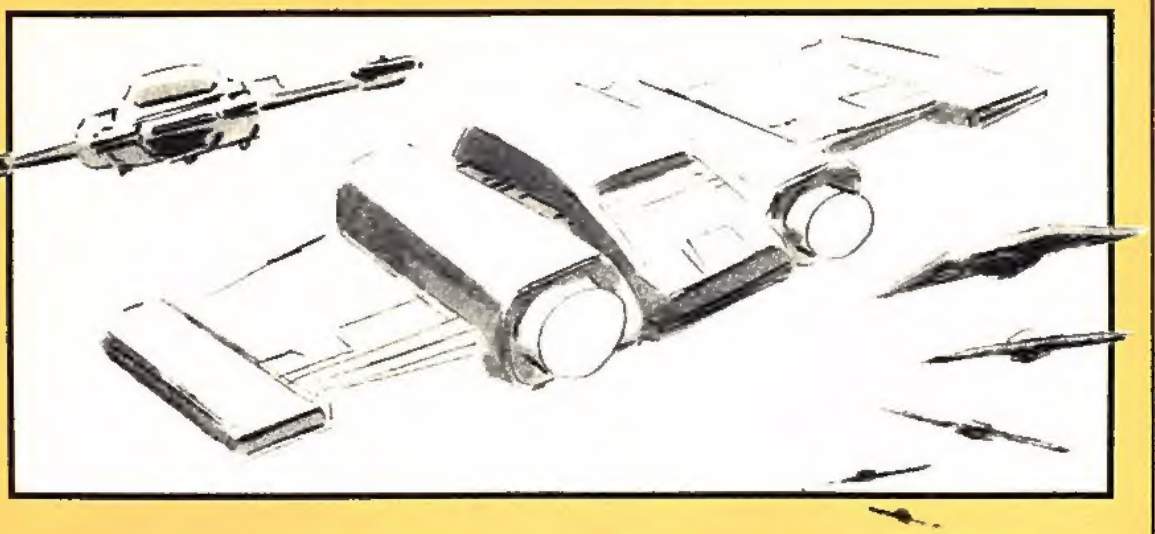
"Still ain't right, man."

"Take it or leave it, man. Ain't makin' any more changes. As it is, I hardly recognize my original ideas."

"All part of the birth process, man. Things change, *evolve*, the more we get into it, like this part where Skreed and Starn — "

"You *requested* that!"

"Yeah, but not like *this*, man. And hey — no way this'll fit into 50 pages. More like 60 at least . . . "



"Just saw your first batch of pages, Paul. Beautiful, maybe the best stuff you've ever done."

"Way I'm going, man, this ain't gonna make 60 pages. Maybe 70 . . . "

"Well, Archie likes it too, so I don't think he'll mind."

"You really like 'em, huh? Even with the change I made?"

"On page nine? Is *that* all you meant?"

"Yeah, well, that's *important*, man."

"Little picky changes like that, if they make you happy, they don't bother me. Now — did you get the next batch of plot?"

"Yeah. You gotta be kidding, man. What you did with *Grod* here? And that stuff Jakosa says to *Phaedra*? We can't do this, man . . . "

"Absolutely no more changes! It's been changed *fifty times!*"

"I'm an *artist*, man."

"And *I'm* ripe for the *booby hatch!*"

"I can't draw something I don't want to draw, man."

"Then *don't*, damn it! I've already decided I'm never gonna work with you *again*, so let's just rush the timetable! I'm going out to Hollywood to write a movie, so why don't you just go back to advertising full-time and we'll call it quits *right here!*"

"We can't do that, man. We're a team. Gulacy and Moench."

"Moench and Gulacy."

"Whatever, as long as I get more money. But teams *collaborate*, remember? *Magic*, man, and for magic you gotta pay the *price*."

"In *blood?* Cuz I'm ready to cut your heart out and stuff it — "

"In *sweat*, man. And all this stuff you got here in the plot, even *without* changes? You gotta be *kidding* about 80 pages . . . "

"Hey, man, just got the latest batch of plot."

"Yeah? If you say I've gotta be kid — "

"It's great, man. Dynamite stuff. You got a real way with words, ya know? But I don't think it's gonna fit into 90 pages . . . "

"Before we discuss **Sirius**, Paul, Deb had the *baby*, man. Nine pounds, a boy, so we stuck with the name Derek."

"Shoulda called him Skreed, man, or maybe Conrad. But that's really great, man. A miracle. Magic."

"Paul? Forget the whole ending. I just got an idea that adds three huge plot twists and makes it more poignant to boot."

"Okay, man, but you realize what this is gonna do to the *length?*"

"**Sirius** can wait, man. I got news. We're gettin' married."

"I saw it coming, Paul. You and Valerie seem happy together."

"Yeah. You wanna stand up at the wedding for me?"

"Well, sure. Been sittin' down too much lately anyway."

"Good. So how's little Conrad doin', man?"

"Paul? Laurie Sutton just called. The marketing people finally saw the pages and went crazy."

"Too *many* of 'em, huh?"

"They wanna publish it in its *own title*, Paul!"

"No way we can meet the deadlines, man."

"Just this *one story* — as a four-issue limited series. Archie says it's fine with him — gettin' too long to serialize anyway."

"Yeah, I'm on page 99 and there's no way it fits into a hundred."

"Epic indeed. But you realize, even in four issues of its own, it shouldn't run any higher than 110?"

"Yeah, man, that's cool. Perfect length."

"Laurie says first issue's at the printer — be out end of May."

"Hard to believe. You wrote 'em all, huh?"

"All 120 of 'em. Almost killed me. But I still gotta do synopses for each issue and an article on 'the making of **Six From Sirius**' — so don't forget to send those character sketches."

"If I've still got 'em, man. I don't know *what* happened to 'em when we moved from Jersey to Oregon. So what's it like back there?"

"Spring of '84 looks good, man. Lots of dogwoods in bloom. Hey, I just realized — Sirius is the Dog Star, and the last issue should come out in the 'dog days' of August, horologically ruled by none other than the Dog Star Sirius. Maybe it's an *omen*."

"Bow wow, man. Horologically speakin', whadda we do *next?*"

"A sequel?"

"Arf."